

This (first) special edition of the NRHA e-forum is to announce the following joint project of great potential importance to health outcomes and services in rural and remote areas. We would be grateful if you would give it some time and pass your ideas and comments to Joan Lipscombe. Thanks. Gordon Gregory

The National Rural Health Alliance has recently begun a joint project on rural health financing with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care.

The aim of the project, in summary, is to develop options for changes in health financing structures that will improve access to health services and health outcomes in remote and rural areas.

The project has a Steering Committee comprising many of the key groups in rural health including the Alliance, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, NACCHO, RFDS, the Pharmacy Guild, the States/Territories, AMA, RDAA and other relevant Commonwealth Departments.

At its first meeting, the Steering Committee identified a range of problems with the current health financing arrangements which affect access to health services and health outcomes in remote and rural Australia. It also identified some preliminary ideas for further discussion on potential solutions to some of these problems.

The Alliance sees it as very important there is ample opportunity for interested individuals and organisations to have their views heard and taken into account. It is intended that there be more formal consultations later in the project. As a first step the Alliance is inviting you to contribute your initial ideas to ensure that we take the widest possible range of views into account in identifying issues and possible solutions

Joan Lipscombe is the Alliance's project coordinator. As a first step Joan would welcome your early input on a range of questions.

(You may be able to respond to these questions from the point of view of the organisation you represent on Council, from your regional or area point of view, and/or from your personal experience. All these will be valuable inputs to the work.)

- What are the issues with the way health services are currently funded which inhibit access to health care or result in poorer outcomes than might otherwise be possible?
- For these issues can you provide any evidence as to the nature and extent of the problems which arise as a result?
- Can you provide examples (perhaps supported by literature references or other evidence) of innovative ways to fund health services which appear to be effective in improving access/outcomes? (The examples you quote may be from overseas.)
- Do you have any preliminary ideas on what could be done to change health funding arrangements to deal with the issues you have identified? These might include, for example, options involving:
 - macro level structural changes to health funding; or
 - increased flexibility between existing programs; or
 - changes within existing programs targeting specific issues for

remote and rural Australia.

Please send your ideas within the next couple of weeks to Joan via the Alliance's email address (nrha@ruralhealth.org.au), fax (02 6285 4670) or mail (PO Box 280 Deakin West, ACT 2600). Alternatively you could ring Joan directly on 02 6262 7975.